

NASSER:

The inside story

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FOIAb3bHis close friend
and adviser

by MOHAMMED HEIKAL

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WHILE President Nasser of Egypt was alive [writes GORDON BROOK-SHEPHERD] Mohammed Heikal was always known as his mouthpiece. Yet it is only now, a year after the Arab leader's death, that Nasser for the first time speaks to the world through Heikal's lips.

What *The Sunday Telegraph* is publishing this week, and in the weeks to come is no outsider's biography of the late Egyptian President. Nor is it one of those so-called inside stories constructed around clippings and interviews with those who claim to know him. Heikal's account is built on Nasser's own story, told largely in Nasser's own words, of the dramas, setbacks and triumphs of his 17 tempestuous years on the international stage.

As one of his closest friends and advisers, and also as his natural biographer, Heikal was at Nasser's side, in Egypt and abroad, at nearly all the critical moments of his career. How Nasser fought, how he reacted, and what he said, was recorded on the spot by Heikal. And the words reproduced today are as Nasser spoke them then.

Nor is this all. Heikal has been able to draw on the records of Nasser's Revolutionary Council meetings, on the secret telegrams of his Ambassadors in the key capitals of the world, and even on the personal correspondence which Nasser conducted with other world leaders.

The actual texts of such correspondence—with, for example, Chairman Khrushchev, President Kennedy, President Johnson and Prime Minister Chou En-lai—will be given in these exclusive extracts from Heikal's forthcoming book.

These letters are far from protocol platitudes. Some are acrimonious and one or two downright angry.

The result of this combination of unique and original Nasser material—the verbal and the documentary—is an historic experience the like of which has not been seen since the great post-war memoirs of a generation ago. This is life at the top table in the 1950s and 1960s. It is described not by somebody listening and peeping through the keyhole, but by one who sat there himself.

So much is new in this Heikal-Nasser story that it is hard to be selective. But perhaps two features of the material stand out. One, which will interest particularly the British reader, is that it contains the first authoritative account ever to appear of the 1956 Suez crisis as seen from the Egyptian side. English, French, American and Israeli statesmen, soldiers and diplomatists have all produced their versions. Now, not just an Egyptian version, but Nasser's own.

It contains many surprises, quite a few shocks, and, whatever one's views may be, much food for thought.

The second outstanding feature is inherent in the way the tale is told. It is not a dry, chronological history but a series of vivid portraits of other world